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The Implementation of Online Classes in Mediating Reading Activities in the Blended Learning Model

Abstract

The presence of technology has massively influenced many fields, including education. In this era, there is an urgency to promote literacy through reading that simultaneously embeds technology in the learning. Reading is considered as an important activity requiring thinking process, and its learning nowadays requires technology. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the implementation of online class in mediating reading activities using blended learning model. The participants in this study consisted of 40 students of Reading-Writing Connection course of a private university in Bandung. The qualitative method of Case Study 2.0 was used as the framework to collect the data using observations, interviews, online artifacts, and analyzing data. This study found that in the reading comprehension learning in a blended learning environment, the online class was used as the means to deliver pre-reading and post-reading activities. The activities in the online learning classes were quizzes, video viewing, and materials such as e-books and worksheets.

Keywords: Online Learning, Blended Learning, Reading Comprehension

1. Introduction

The presence of technology has a massive influence in various fields, especially education. Digital literacy (reading, writing and digital interaction) is one of the requirements to support future success that every student must possess (Partnership for 21st Skills, 2008). To facilitate the students' learning, strengthening their competence in reading skills is significant. Reading is an activity not only intended to seek for information from a text, but it is also categorized as a literacy activity that involves a thinking process, which is needed as a requirement to be able to interact with a text (Hudson, 2007).

In addition, reading is one of the important aspects of the language acquisition process (Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017). However, in the practice of classroom learning, reading activities are often taught passively. The current concept of the learning of reading requires it to be interactive involving the students in the process of capturing meaning and they must participate actively in class and become independent learners (Yang and Wilson, 2006).

The development of technology and the internet can be used to improve the quality of the learning of reading in schools. In other words, the internet can be used as a means to practice reading (Krajka, 2006). Teachers can use it to improve and produce active interactions between students inside and outside the classroom (Looi & Yusop, 2011). Chun (2006) affirms the benefits of integrating technology and internet in supporting reading learning:

- Providing access to electronic dictionaries
- Facilitating word recognition in the reading text automatically
- Providing access to design authentic materials
- Providing web-based reading facilities

This use of technology gives numerous contributions to learning, and one of which is new learning models such as Blended Learning. This learning model is a hybrid learning model that combines face-to-face learning with online learning (McGee and Reis, 2012). Furthermore, Bersin (2003) explains that Blended Learning is a learning model that can be developed to support specific subjects and specific audiences.

In reading comprehension learning, this model can be used as a way to provide additional access to learning materials, as a strategy to start reading activities (pre-reading activity) and as an activity to evaluate the learning (post-reading activity). Another benefit of the implementation of

Blended Learning model in reading is the additional aid in the reading acquisition process to support students who have poor reading skills (MacArthur, Ferretti, Okolo, & Cavalier, 2001).

Blended Learning supports flexibility for learners, especially in reading activities. Students have the flexibility to manage responses to teaching materials in their own convenience (self-paced learning), and independent exercises that are certainly unreachable by face-to-face learning systems (Johnson, Perry, & Shamir, 2010). Therefore, it can effectively support individual student's learning activities (Saine, Lerkkanen, Ahonen, Tolvanen, & Lyytinen, 2011) and support learning at all levels in both institutions and classes (Graham, 2006).

The implementation of Blended Learning in reading can be done using the Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE) platform named Learning Management System (LMS) or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform. The platform was developed by Martin Dougiamas to provide access to educators and students to interact and collaborate online (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003). This platform can be used for free and is currently being used in various schools and colleges in the world to implement distance learning and hybrid learning such as Blended Learning.

Studies on the integration of technology into reading learning have been carried out by researchers in various places. Maduabuchi & Emechebe (2016) examined the effect of technology in supporting reading learning and argued learning mediated by technology can have benefits in supporting reading skills to students, especially in building vocabulary. In addition, studies from various countries in Asia have also been able to reveal the benefits of social networking sites in facilitating reading and learning activities, such as encouraging students' positive attitudes and perceptions (Kabilan, Ahmad, and Abidin, 2010), and improving students' performance (Park and Kim, 2011).

Broadly speaking, this study focuses on investigating the implementation of online classes in mediating reading comprehension activities in the Blended Learning model by emphasizing on the activities used in the classes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Comprehension

Grabe and Stoller (2002) verify that reading is not only about obtaining meaning from texts and interpreting information, but also building information correctly. Furthermore, Hudson (2007) states that reading is motivated by the readers' specific goals and is intended to improve understanding through texts. Reading is a complex process that involves a process of understanding. Understanding can be defined as distinguishing and obtaining general ideas and specific facts and seeing how these ideas and facts are organized and developed (Nation, 2009).

Based on the aforementioned elaboration, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is a process aiming at understanding the ideas of a text correctly. In relation, Alyousef (2006) states that in the process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text and tries to interpret the meaning and uses various types of knowledge possessed including linguistic or system knowledge and schematic knowledge.

Wallace (1992) asserts that in addition to background knowledge, understanding is also influenced by the readers' knowledge of language and text structure, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and also their reasoning abilities, motivation, and level of involvement. In detail, there are at least six components of general skills and knowledge to help students possess good reading skills (Grabe, 1991):

- Skill of automatic recognition
- Knowledge of vocabulary and structure
- Knowledge of structure of formal discourse
- Skill and strategy in synthesizing and evaluation
- Background knowledge of the world
- Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring

In terms of reading process, many researchers have tried to create a general understanding of the reading process using a framework known as the general reading model. The model used as a strategy

in reading is the concept of New Literacy Model. A distinctive feature of this model is how it defines reading comprehension as a process of reader-text interaction, which links to the reader's knowledge (Bloome, 1993). In addition, Bloome (1993) admits that recognizing and examining are a social context involving social interaction, reading, and writing. This view suggests that readers can interpret meaning derived from a text as a cultural context and their interpretation is not mistaken (Hudson, 2007). In other words, reading activity involves thinking process and is a social interaction between the reader and the writer. In turn, it requires the readers to be able to understand the text as a medium for understanding ideas.

2.2. *Blended Learning*

Blended learning is a combination of various training media (technology, activities, and face-to-face) to develop the best training programs for specific purposes (Bersin, 2004; Willson and Smilanich, 2005). In classroom management activities, the Blended Learning approach combines classroom face-to-face methods with computers to produce instructional approaches (Latchem and Jung, 2010; Bielawski and Metcalf, 2003) and to bring new learning environments (Finn and Bucherri, 2004; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). Furthermore, Thorne (2003) explains that the purpose of the Blended approach is to facilitate students with interactive experiences and flexibility in the learning process.

Many teachers use computer-based media to increase their students' motivation and learning (Marsh, 2012), such as the use of software referred to as E-learning or online learning. Several studies have shown that students could learn successfully in online learning and traditional face-to-face classes (Donnelly, 2010; Woltering, Herlier, Spitzer and Spreckelsen, 2009). However, recently, it has also been accepted that online learning with a single course environment setting cannot direct students to produce optimal performance in learning (Kocoglu, Ozek, and Kesli, 2011). Therefore, educators have combined traditional face-to-face classes with online learning programs or learning management systems in mixed learning designs to produce classroom teaching and to promote active and flexible learning (Gamham and Kaleta, 2002).

Over the past decade, Blended Learning has also been implemented into language teaching and is still considered as a new concept for many educators (Marsh, 2012). However, some other studies (Pena Sanchez and Hicks, 2006; Stracke, 2005; and Stracke, 2007a) show that Blended Learning could effectively enhance the learning experience when properly implemented. In another study on Blended Learning, Bekele and Menchaca (2008) identified a number of research that found the positive effects of Blended Learning on (1) students' performance (Ladyshevsky, 2004; Motteram, 2006), (2) students' participation and motivation (DeGeorge-Walker & Keeffe, 2010; Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez & Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011; Ugur, Akkoyunlu & Kurbanoglu, 2011), (3) increased access and flexibility (Macedo-Rouet), Ney, Charles & Lallich-Boidin, 2009), (4) cost effectiveness (Herman & Banister, 2007); and (5) more active and deeper learning (Bonk, Kim & Zeng, 2006). Marsh (4: 2012) also identified the following strengths of blended learning:

- Providing a more individual learning experience;
- Facilitating a more personalized learning support;
- Providing support and encourages independent and collaborative learning;
- Increasing students' involvement in learning;
- Accommodating various language styles;
- Arranging a place to practice target language outside the classroom;
- Providing a less stressful training environment for the target language;
- Providing flexibility in learning, anytime and anywhere to meet the needs of target learners;
- Helping students develop the 21st century learning skills.

To conclude, Blended Learning can be a powerful model for improving the quality of teaching, especially language teaching. This is a combination of various learning media to develop the best training programs for specific purposes (Bersin, 2004; Willson and Smilanich, 2005). Thus, the model can strengthen learning content, improve accessibility of learning materials, and help with the collaboration and communication in the learning process (Aborisade, 2009).

2.3. Teaching Reading Comprehension in a Blended Environment

In language teaching, Tomlinson (2013) states that Blended Learning design must aim at reducing the problems that exist in language teaching by:

- Maximizing students' exposure to English;
- Providing experiences for all students from various academic genres and opportunities for individual students to gain further experience for their specialization;
- Increasing students' affective and cognitive involvement by providing text and assignment choices;
- Serving different levels and aspirations by giving choices of text and assignments;
- Providing opportunities for students to make their own discoveries about the use of English features to achieve the desired results;
- Providing opportunities for students to seek regular feedback from peers and teachers about their communicative performance; and
- Providing opportunities for teachers to monitor the progress of their students in a way that allows them to provide constructive criticism and responsive teaching when needed most.

In implementing Blended Learning, activities using LMS (such as Moodle, Schoology, and Edmodo) also have the potential to provide a platform that facilitates reading interactivity, develops independent learning, and supports meaning-making activities (Looi and Yusop, 2011).

Several previous studies have found the improvements in students' performance when learning using online activities (such as the use of social networking sites) were included in English teaching and learning. For example, Park and Kim (2011) examined the reading strategies used by the students of English as a Second Language (ESL) in a series of online reading assignments. Their study found that 'hybrid' online ESL readers could use their reading strategies creatively to understand the tasks. Additionally, online tasks can be used as a way to find out more about the target language (Meskill, 1999).

3. Research Method

3.1. Participants

The participants in this research were 40 students of Reading-Writing Connections course at a private university in Bandung.

3.2. Research Design

This research used a qualitative case study method as the framework for analyzing data. Case Study 2.0 is a method to capture a social phenomenon that occurs on a digital platform. Creswell (2012) affirms that a case study is a model designed to examine a social phenomenon through in-depth investigation.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

This study used observations, interviews, and online artifacts as instruments in answering the research questions. Observations were carried out in both online and face-to-face classes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to lecturers and students. The students were selected based on their achievements (high, moderate, and low achievers). Online artifacts were carried out to provide data on student activities, learning scores, and learning material. This study was conducted in September - December 2018.

To analyze the collected data, Creswell's strategy (1998, 112-113) which involved data management, reading, memo-making, describing, classifying, interpreting, representing, and visualizing, was used in this study. The next stage was to label and group the data into a theme so that the data can be presented clearly and in detail. A triangulation was carried out to confirm the data

obtained from each instrument, hence, the potential bias in this research could be reduced. This was done to ensure that any data can be connected with other findings.

4. Results

In its implementation, Blended Learning was carried out in Reading-Writing Connection course in one private university in Bandung.. In the observation process, each session was recorded and noted.. The learning was divided into eight topics, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Observation Data

No	Teaching Program	Session Needed	Pre-Reading	Whilst Reading	Post Reading
1	Hi!!	2	Face-to-face class	Face-to-face class	Face-to-face and Online Class
2	Getting personal	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
3	I love learning	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
4	My routines	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
5	What's in your bag	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
6	That's mine	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
7	My family tree	2	Online class	Face-to-face class	Online class
8	My dad can	2	Face-to-face class	Face-to-face class	Face-to-face and Online Class

The learning was divided into face-to-face meetings and was supported by online classes as supplementary materials for learning outside the classroom. Hence, the students were able to access material from outside the classroom. The students were able to access the materials using mobile phones so that the learning became more flexible and the learning materials could be accessed easily. The following are the learning activities in the online classes.

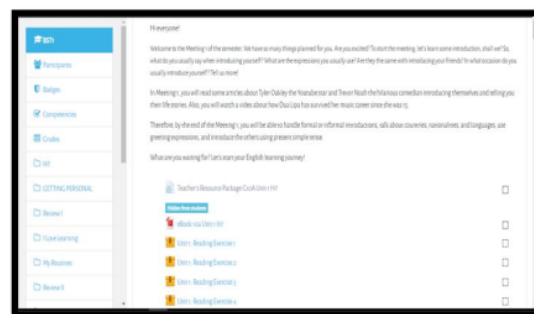


Fig 1. Online Class Activities

During the online learning, the students were required to do exercises aim at improving their reading ability. Each topic consisted of four reading comprehension exercises activities. Then, the exercises were used as pre-reading activities in order to build the students' knowledge before the learning or as final activities (post-reading activities) and evaluation of the students' ability to understand the learning materials. Figure 2 and 3 display the learning activities in the online class.



Fig 2. Student Exercise Activities in the Online Class

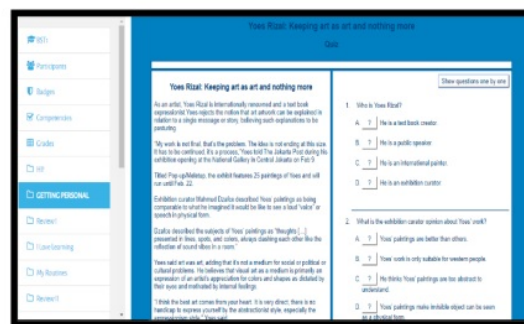


Fig 3. Student Exercise Activities in the Online Class

Subsequently, several artifacts showed that the students obtained online classes and also other learning materials in the form of learning e-books used in face-to-face meeting learning activities. Therefore, the learning was supported by diverse materials that are interconnected with each other (Online and Face-to-face class). The data is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

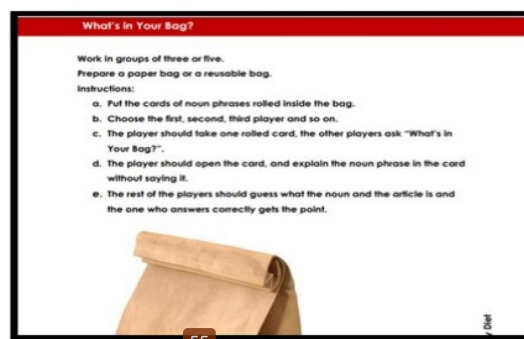


Fig 4. E-book and Face-to-Face Class Materials

Furthermore, the evaluation of learning was carried out automatically and stored in Moodle. The lecturers input the offline materials into Moodle. Every exercise carried out by the students was easily identified because the data were easily obtained in Moodle. All data were then downloaded for learning evaluation purposes. The data on student assessment and evaluation is illustrated in Figure 5.

[illegible]

Fig 5. Student Learning Assessment and Evaluation

The data obtained from the interviews showed the fact that the lecturers understood well about comprehensive reading learning. The following are excerpts of the interviews with the lecturers:

Interview I with a Lecturer

"Menurut pendapat saya, reading comprehension adalah sebuah proses untuk memahami, menafsirkan, dan menguraikan informasi dari teks. Dalam proses ini, pembaca berinteraksi secara dinamis dengan teks serta mencoba menggambar makna dan menggunakan berbagai jenis pengetahuan."

(In my opinion, reading comprehension is a process to understand, interpret, and describe information from a text. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text and tries to draw meaning and use various types of knowledge.)

This statement was in line with the process of the teaching program that the lecturer conducted. He began by introducing how to understand the main topics and ideas in a text; then by training the students to understand the context through vocabulary; and then finally training the students to use their knowledge background in interacting with the texts.

In addition, he also had skills in integrating technology into the learning process. In his perception, ICT is intended to improve the quality of learning. This statement is also in line with Vo (2003) stating that an important part in integrating ICT into the teaching and learning process is its purpose of improving the quality of learning.

The next interview question was related to the implementation of Blended Learning using Moodle in teaching reading comprehension. The following is the excerpt of the conversation.

Interview II with a Lecturer

"Moodle sangat bermanfaat dalam pembelajaran membaca, karena dapat menunjang memberikan materi tambahan pada mahasiswa di luar kampus. Hal itu bermanfaat untuk membantu kami meningkatkan eksposur terhadap sebuah teks."

(Moodle is very useful in reading learning, because it aids in providing additional materials for the students outside the campus. It is useful to help us to have more exposure to a text.)

This is in line with Biancarosa and Griffiths (2012) arguing that technology is able to provide more opportunities for students to improve their reading skills. The next interviews were conducted with three students. The first interview question was about their opinions about the lecturers' strategy in teaching reading comprehension. All respondents expressed that most of the lecturers' strategies were appropriate in helping them improve their reading skills. They also said that the classes were enjoyable. The following is an excerpt of an interview with a student.

Interview with Student I (High Achiever Student)

"Cara-cara mengajar dosen sangat bermanfaat buat saya dalam memahami bacaan dalam bahasa Inggris."

(The lecturers' ways of teaching are very useful for me in understanding reading in English.)

Interview with Student II (Moderate Achiever Student)

"Cara mengajarnya menyenangkan dan membuat saya semakin menyukai belajar bahasa Inggris."

(The lecturers' ways of teaching is fun and I enjoy learning English more.)

Interview with Student III (Low Achiever Student)

"Saya merasa lebih mudah dalam belajar membaca karena kelasnya selalu menarik."

(I find it easier to learn to read because the class is always interesting.)

They benefitted greatly from learning reading from conventional face-to-face classes and online classes. They said that even though Moodle was something new to them, they did not have many problems in operating it and the features were very easy to understand. They also said that learning to use Moodle was enjoyable.

Interview with Student VI (Low Achiever Student)

"Ya, Moodle adalah kelas online yang sangat menyenangkan. Meskipun baru pertama menggunakan kelas online saya tidak kesulitan menggunakannya."

(Yes, Moodle is a very enjoyable online class. Even though I have only used online classes for the first time, I have no trouble using them.)

The final question was related to the implementation of online Blended Learning in teaching reading comprehension. All respondents said that the use of Moodle and online classes gave them many benefits. The first benefit was that blended learning provided new experiences in learning. This idea corresponds to Dudeney and Hockey (2007) stating that technology provides new learning experiences and cultures for students.

Second, the Blended Learning model provided convenience to the students in accessing the teaching materials. The following is an excerpt of the interviews with a student.

Interview with Student IV (Moderate Achiever Student)

"Saya sangat terbantu dengan kelas online dan tatap muka karena mudah mengakses materi belajar."

(I have acquired a lot of help in the online and face-to-face classes because I can easily access the learning materials.)

The third benefit was that the use of online classes provided flexibility in learning, especially outside the classroom. The following is an excerpt of an interview with a student.

Interview with Student VI (Low Achiever Student)

"Saya bisa belajar di mana pun dan kapanpun saya mau hanya dengan menggunakan mobile phone saja."

(I can study wherever and whenever I want just by using a mobile phone.)

The interview excerpt shows that the online learning model using the Blended Learning model was able to offer several benefits in supporting student learning activities. The students were aided in understanding the learning as a whole and they could easily access the learning materials outside the classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study aims at finding out the implementation of online classes mediating reading learning in the Blended Learning model. This study found that in reading in a Blended Learning environment, online classes were used as the means for pre-reading and post reading activities. Online classes were the means for brainstorming activity that are used to help the students build knowledge before they conduct face-to-face classes as well as a means to evaluate the students' ability to understand the materials being taught. The activities that occurred in the online learning classes were doing quizzes, watching videos, and obtaining materials such as e-books and worksheets.

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